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CONSTRUCTIVE STUDIES IN THE PRIESTLY ELEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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I. ITS GENERAL SCOPE.

THE subject treated in this series of studies is so extensive and the number of topics to be considered is so great that in the nature of things it is impracticable to give specific references to literature in connection with each topic. The student is referred in general to the following books: Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1893; Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, of which three volumes have thus far been issued; *Encyclopædia Biblica*, edited by T. K. Cheyne and J. Sutherland Black, of which the first volume only has as yet appeared; Nowack, *Lehrbuch der hebräischen Archäologie*; Benzinger, *Hebräische Archäologie*; W. R. Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (second edition, 1894); Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I, pp. 174-220, 337-406; Vol. II, pp. 65-78; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, pp. 1-167; Green, *The Hebrew Feasts*, etc.¹

For the sake of brevity it seems unwise, and in view of the organization of the material it is unnecessary, to insert questions and suggestions as aids to study. The reader should study carefully in connection with each topic the passages cited in the parallel column, which furnish the basis for the statements made in the body of the text.

§ 1. **Three Elements Enter into Religion.**—The religion of an individual or nation depends upon the prominence given to one or another of these elements:

Ps. 103:1; 150.

(1) *Worship*, or, more technically, *cult*, a word which expresses the general attitude of the individual or group of individuals toward that outside higher world of

¹ Reference may also be made to JOHN D. DAVIS, *A Dictionary of the Bible*.

supernatural or divine existence, and which includes the outward acts that in various forms symbolize the inward thought.

(2) *Belief*, or, more technically, *creed*, a word which expresses the peculiar intellectual position entertained by an individual or group of individuals concerning certain facts supposed to be essential, and their explanation.

Deut. 6:4;
John 3:36.

(3) *Conduct*, or, more technically, *ethics*, which includes all the acts and feelings of man in so far as they are related to his duties to himself and to his fellows, and to the fundamental ideas of right and wrong.

Mic. 6:8;
Isa. 1:16, 17;
James 1:27.

§2. **Three Great Channels of Revelation** are found in the Old Testament; through these, separately and together, there has come down to us a wonderful story of the interworking of God and man. These are:

(1) The *word* of the prophet, including the utterances through centuries of that unique order established to give to the Hebrew nation and to the world the "word" of God.

Jer. 18:18;
Jer. 1:11.

(2) The *counsel* of the sage, including the wise sayings and philosophical teachings (in the form of proverbs, riddles, essays, dialogues, etc.) found, for example, in the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

Jer. 18:18;
Prov. 1:5, 25,
30; 8:14.

(3) The *instruction* (or law) of the priest, which forms the subject of consideration in this and the following articles.

Jer. 18:18;
Ps. 19:7.

§3. **The Place of Worship is First of All to be Noticed.**

— In ancient times because it seemed to men that *certain places* were more favored by the gods than others, in modern times because men fancy that a certain environment is especially conducive to the spirit of worship, the *place* has always been a subject of greatest importance. The place was in early days something *connected with nature*:

(1) *High places*, or hills, were especially sought as being the abode of God.

1 Kings 14:23;
1 Chron. 21:29;
Exod. 19:2, 3, 12.

(2) *Trees* of a notable character are frequently referred to as connected with worship.

Gen. 12:6; 13:18.

(3) *Springs, or wells*, are places by the side of which angels were thought to dwell.

Gen. 16:13, 14.

Gen. 31: 44-54;
Gen. 28: 18-22.

(4) *Sacred stones* are mentioned as places to which the god came to meet his worshiper, and on which food is placed or libations of oil poured out.

In each of these places Jehovah has shown his presence, and it is for this reason that the hill or tree or spring or stone is sacred. (From Numb. 22: 41 it is to be seen that this idea of sacred places was found among other nations; cf. also Isa. 16: 12.)

The place was also often something of a more or less *artificial* character, as is seen in the use of—

Exod. 20: 24-26;
1 Kings 7: 48;
2 Kings 16: 10-15;
Exod. 27: 1-8;
1 Kings 2: 28-30.

(5) *The altar*, which was sometimes only of loose earth thrown up; at others, of unhewn stone; at still others, of gold and precious stones. This altar was the refuge and asylum of him who fled the hand of vengeance, the witness of vows, the place on which the sacrifice was laid.

Josh. 4: 11;
1 Sam. 4: 3-6;
2 Sam. 6: 2-17;
Exod. 25: 10-21;
Exod. 25: 22.

(6) *The ark, or chest*, a sacred box in which certain sacred things were deposited; used in case of war, because it was thought to afford protection; designated as a place of communion with God.

2 Sam. 7: 2-6;
Exod., chap. 26;
Exod. 33: 7-9;
Numb. 17: 4, 12, 13.

(7) *The tent, or tabernacle*, a dwelling in which the ark is preserved, and around which the holiest associations cluster. Moses makes most practical use of it, and it comes to occupy an important place in Hebrew thought and tradition.

1 Kings 6: 1, 2, 11-14, 37, 38;
Ezek. 43: 1-12;
Hag. 1: 4-14;
Ezra 3: 12, 13;
6: 13-18.

(8) *The temple*, which with the progress of civilization (the establishment of courts and the building of palaces) takes the place of the tent, as being more dignified than a *tent*. There was (*a*) Solomon's temple, erected at a significant period of national development; (*b*) the temple of Ezekiel's vision, which was destined to play an important part in the history of Israel's religious thought; and (*c*) the second temple, erected with some disappointment, after the return from exile.

Exod. 3: 2-5;
Ps. 137.

It is to be noted, once more, that communion with God is sought and obtained in connection with natural places (hills, trees, springs, stones) and with places constructed by man (altars, ark, tent, temple). It will be at a later time, when temples are destroyed, men are scattered, groups living here and there, when the

realistic conception gives place to the idealistic, and the material to the spiritual, that synagogues and churches will spring into existence, and, thus in still another form, satisfy the inward craving of humanity for a *sacred place*, in which to offer worship to the unseen powers.

§ 4. **The Priest, or Minister** of worship, was the second necessity of worship, the first being the place. It is the *priest* who conducts the worship.

(1) His function was threefold: to carry the ark, to minister to Jehovah, to bless in his name. In the earliest times the need of having some such priest was felt, his presence being thought to be attended with peculiar blessing.

Deut. 10:8;
Judg. 17:7-13;
18:3-6;
Lev. 8:1-10.

(2) The priest-idea became so strong in Israel that the nation itself was understood to be a nation of priests, or a priestly nation, set apart to minister to the other nations of the world. After the exile, kings cease to sit on Israel's throne; and priests, under the form of a hierarchy, control the affairs of the nation. This fact shows how great a rôle the priest plays in Israelitish history.

Deut. 14:2;
Exod. 19:6;
Ezra 7:21, 25, 26.

(3) Besides the priests and prophets who served and spoke for Jehovah, there were at many times in Israel's history priests and prophets whose lives were devoted to the service of other gods.

1 Kings 18:19-22;
2 Kings 23:4, 5;
Ezek. 8:15, 16.

§ 5. **Sacrifice** was the most significant act of worship in ancient times.

(1) At first this was a social meal, a banquet in which the offerer and his friends participated and to which the deity was invited. There are frequent references to such sacrificial meals in which the members of a family, or of a clan, or, indeed, of a whole nation take part. This meal was full of joy, sometimes boisterous. Those who participated were eating and drinking with the deity; it was a communion of the worshiper and his god.

Gen. 18:1-8;
1 Sam. 1:3-8;
9:23-25;
1 Chron. 16:1-3

(2) In later times *sacrifice* becomes more formal, and gradually grows into an exclusively religious act. The prophets strongly denounce *sacrifice* in which the true spirit of worship is lacking, or which in itself, without a

Ps. 51:18, 19;
Isa. 1:11-17;
Lev., chaps. 1-7;
8-10; 11; 12-15;
etc.

proper life, is thought to gain Jehovah's favor. The book of Leviticus is devoted to the subject of *sacrifice*, viz., the method, the kinds, etc., etc. This more formal and exclusively religious conception of sacrifice comes to prevail universally in the last centuries of Israel's history.

(3) Several different kinds of *offerings* or sacrifice were distinguished, according as each expressed a particular purpose, or was presented by a particular method ; among these were :

Gen. 8: 20;
Lev., chaps. 4, 9.

(a) *The burnt-offering*, which consisted of the burning of a whole animal of the proper kind upon an altar as an offering to Jehovah.

Lev. 3: 1-6;
Judg. 20: 26.

(b) *The peace-offering*, which was also an animal sacrifice, but differed from the burnt-offering in that it provided for the giving of only the blood and certain specified parts of the animal to Jehovah, the rest being eaten by the sacrificial guests.

Gen. 35: 14;
Exod. 29: 40, 41;
Numb. 28: 7.

(c) *The drink-offering*, which was a libation of wine, or oil, usually made in connection with other offerings.

Exod. 30: 1, 7-9;
Numb. 4: 16.

(d) *The incense-offering*, in which fragrant spices were burned with the thought that the rising fragrance was acceptable to Jehovah.

Lev., chaps. 5, 7,
14;
Numb. 6: 12.

(e) *The trespass-offering*, which was made for the purpose of expiating offenses against Jehovah and man in which the damage could be estimated and covered by compensation ; the blood of the animal was poured out to Jehovah, the fat was burned on the altar, and the rest was the perquisite of the priests.

Lev. 4: 24-34;
Lev., chap. 16;
Numb., chap. 7;
15: 27.

(f) *The sin-offering*, which occupied a very important place in the cultus and of which the emphasis placed upon the shedding of blood is a conspicuous feature ; the specifications for this part of the ritual are very complete and detailed.

Deut. 12: 6-17;
Numb. 15: 19-21;
Numb. 18: 8-29;
Exod. 29: 27, 28.

(g) *The heave-offering*, consisting of certain portions of the sacrifice that were given over to the priests and were waved by them before the altar as a token of the fact that they belonged to Jehovah, but had been given over by him to the priests.

Exod. 20: 24;
29: 40; 30: 1;
Lev. 2: 1, 4, 13;
7: 12; 23: 13.

(4) Great care was taken as to the materials which might enter into a sacrifice. These were in general flesh,

fine flour or meal, incense, oil, wine, cakes of dough, salt. Here again important conceptions were associated with each of the materials, and regulations were enacted prescribing the exact character and amount of materials to be used.

§ 6. **The Times of Worship** were an important item, for these were the feast occasions; these were often merely the social meals of a clan; or, in other cases, connected with a pilgrimage. They had their origin in connection with the times of the moon and the seasons, arising, as they did, out of the pastoral or agricultural life. Men whose hearts have the same tendencies are drawn together, and in the act of association there is worship; for the more closely they are united, the nearer they may come to God. To know more of God is itself to worship him, and the highest form of worship is, perhaps, that which involves communion with others as well as with God.

(1) There were three great feasts, the first coming in the springtime, the second in the early summer, the third in the autumn. These correspond roughly to the more modern Easter, Pentecost, and Thanksgiving seasons.

(2) There were also special feasts and feast days, which in early times seem to have been of a joyous character.

(3) There were days, like the Day of Atonement, which were days of affliction rather than of joy.

(4) There were also fast days, as well as feast days, celebrating some great calamity.

§ 7. **Other Acts of Worship.**—In connection with and forming a part of worship were several specific acts, such as—

(1) *Prayer*; this was always implied in the act of sacrifice, but very frequently it was independent of sacrifice. If the deity is a person, and if he has real interest in his clan or tribe or people, he will surely listen to them, when in distress their heart appeals for succor; and also when in joy they express appreciation of some great favor which he has shown them. Abraham's prayer

1 Sam. 9: 12, 13,
22-24;
1 Sam. 1: 3, 4.

Exod. 23: 14-17.

Nos. 2: 11.

Lev. 16: 29-34.

Zech. 7: 3-5;
Esther 9: 28-31.

Gen. 24: 12 ff.;
1 Sam. 1: 10; 8: 6;
1 Kings 8: 23-53;
Isa. 38: 2, 3;
Neh. 1: 4-11; 2: 4.

for the city in which his relatives dwelt is characteristic of the earliest and the latest periods of civilization, and is thoroughly typical of humanity.

Judg. 11: 30-39;
1 Sam. 1: 11;
Judg. 13: 3-7;
Numb. 6: 1-12.

(2) *The vow* was a kind of prayer, very common in ancient times, and, when once made, regarded as inviolable. The vow sometimes involved a simple gift; at others, perhaps, as in the case of Jephthah, the sacrifice of a human life; at still others, as in the case of the Nazirite, it signified setting apart to the service of God.

1 Kings 6: 19;
Exod. 28: 30;
Gen. 20: 3; 28: 10,
18.

(3) *The oracle and dream*, as methods of ascertaining the divine will, must be counted as acts of worship. In these methods, as in all the others, the Israelites did not differ from the other ancient nations in the midst of whom they dwelt.

Isa. 47: 9;
Jer. 27: 9;
Mal. 3: 5;
Dan. 2: 2;
Deut. 18: 9-13.

(4) *Sorcery* was also employed in many forms, for there were diviners, augurers, enchanters, charmers, consultants with familiar spirits, wizards, and necromancers; but acts of this kind were always forbidden.

Gen. 4: 21;
Amos 5: 23;
Isa. 30: 29, 32;
Jer. 48: 36;
Numb. 10: 2;
31: 6;
Josh. 6: 4 ff.;
Ps. 137: 2; 33: 2;
2 Sam. 16: 14;
Exod. 15: 20;
Ps. 149: 3; 150: 4.

(5) *Music and dancing* were accompaniments of worship. If worship is the expression of the heart in communion with God, it must include melody and rhythm, sound and movement. Music has always formed a part of worship, and in many cases dancing has accompanied, not only festival, but worship.

§ 8. **Songs and Hymns of Worship.**—These furnish us, perhaps, the highest product of the priest-work; for, although much of the Psalter is prophetic in its character, by far the greater part is the high and holy expression of the soul of individual or nation in its deepest communion with God; and nowhere in all literature may religious songs of so tender and deep a character be found as in the Hebrew Psalter, the hymn-book of the Hebrew temple, the work of the Hebrew priest. These have been variously and quite minutely classified; but here reference may be limited to—

Pss. 103; 134; 136.

(1) Songs of thanksgiving, in which gratitude is expressed for great favors received from Jehovah and his praises are gladly sung.

Pss. 80; 88; 102.

(2) Songs of petition and prayer, in which the poet pleads for the intervention of Jehovah in behalf of

himself or of Israel, bringing deliverance from difficulty and danger, or restoration to divine favor.

(3) Songs of penitential confession, in which the sinner pours out his confession of sin and guilt. Pss. 51; 116; 130.

§ 9. **Laws Regulating Worship and Life** were, likewise, largely formulated, promulgated, and executed by the priests. Legislation, therefore, in its stricter sense, was the function of the priests, rather than of the prophets or sages. The priest's work included something more than the various elements which enter into or are connected with what we would today call *worship*. In those days the religious life and the secular life were the same. Religion and politics were the same. This means that it was impossible to draw a line between religious life and ordinary life. The priest's work dealt with both. It had to do, consequently, with such matters as the treatment of one's neighbor's cattle, the treatment of birds, the building of a house. There were laws, for example, concerning the harvest, the oppression of the poor, the treatment of defectives, tale-bearing, etc., etc. These passages are examples only, taken from the great lawbooks like Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. It is to be understood, of course, that these laws, as they are from time to time formulated, include the teachings of the prophets and sages, as they appear and do their work and pass away. But in addition to these laws of sociological character there were the laws which regulated the details of worship in all respects, *e. g.*, the priest, his dress, his maintenance, the offerings, their material, etc., etc. These more strictly come into consideration in connection with topics already discussed (*cf.* §§ 3, 7).

§ 10. **The History of Worship** was naturally written or compiled by priests, and thus constitutes a part of the priest-work of the Old Testament. The history of Israel, as we find it in the books of Samuel and Kings, had already been written (about 550 B. C.). This history was prepared from a wholly prophetic point of view. It was intended to teach prophetic lessons, especially those connected with the idea of the enormity of sin and its disastrous consequences. At a later date (about 300 B. C.) the

Deut. 22: 1-12;
Exod. 21: 1-35;
22: 1-27.

Lev. 19: 9-37;
Exod. 23: 1-9.

Exod. 23: 18, 19;
Deut. 30: 15-20;
Lev., chap. 21.

2 Chron. 5: 2-7: 2;
compare 1 Kings
chap. 8.

1 Chron., chaps.
15, 16;
compare 2 Sam.
6: 12-19.

2 Chron., chaps.
29-32;
compare
2 Kings, chaps.
18-20.

priests undertook to traverse the field of sacred history, and in so doing used, to some extent, the same original sources. This *priestly history* is found in the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In these books the thought always uppermost is that of the *history of worship*. Its purpose was to assist in establishing regular service in the second temple, and to kindle in the hearts of the people a national life and spirit, and respect for the institutions of the national religion. The differences in matter, tone, and spirit between the prophetic and the priestly histories is easily seen by a comparison of the treatment which each gives to the same subject, *e. g.*

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|---|--|
| | (1) The dedication of the temple. |
| 1 Chron., chaps. 28, 29; compare 1 Kings 1:32-40. | (2) The transfer of the ark to Jerusalem. |
| 1 Chron., chap. 21; compare 2 Sam., chap. 24. | (3) The accession of Solomon. |
| 2 Sam. 11:2-27. | (4) The account of the plague in David's reign. |
| | (5) The sin of David with Bathsheba, which is not mentioned in Chronicles. |
| 1 Chron., chaps. 23-26. | (6) The organization of the priests and Levites and temple officials, which is treated in full in Chronicles, and not mentioned in Samuel and Kings. |

It is proposed, after this general view of the work of the priests as a whole, to undertake to do five things in the following series of studies:

(1) To trace the history of worship from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament times, through the early, the middle, and the late periods.

(2) To classify and note the elements of worship in the Hebrew Psalter, the Christian's Book of Psalms.

(3) To analyze and present the essential points of interest in the histories which the priests themselves prepared, and which are found in the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

(4) To determine the great ideas which entered into and controlled the priest-work.

(5) To explain as far as it may be possible (*a*) the purpose and spirit of this *priest-element* as it appears in its various forms in Israelitish history and literature; (*b*) the permanent, as distinguished from the transitory, elements which it contained; (*c*) the contribution which it made to Christianity, or, in other words, its relationship to Christianity.